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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2034  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: ALIYEV'S DOWNBEAT FAREWELL

REF: BAKU 453

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE DERSE, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: In a farewell call with the Ambassador on June 22, President Ilham Aliyev vented about a series of issues on which he claimed the United States has ignored Azerbaijan's interests, despite Baku's real and continuing contributions to U.S. policy priorities, especially on security and energy. He warned that de-linking Turkey-Armenia reconciliation from Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) will guarantee Armenian intransigence in future negotiations. While acknowledging that Azerbaijan has not satisfied Washington on matters of democracy and human rights, he argued that his country has delivered on numerous issues and deserves to be treated as a real ally. He added that the goals the U.S. is pursuing at Azerbaijan's expense are not worth losing his country as an ally and link to Central Asia.

¶2. (S/NF) Summary Continued: The President said that if the U.S. could assist with defensive equipment to help Azerbaijan address its real defense needs, this would be a "strong positive signal." Aliyev observed that the current upheaval in Iran, a result of internal rivalries and the people's fatigue with repression, was unexpected and could signal the beginning of a new stage there. Aliyev said he "views very positively" U.S. proposals for a battalion-size deployment in support of OEF and has instructed his Defense Minister to take the plan forward. In a farewell luncheon she hosted for the Ambassador, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva also made a surprising plea for greater U.S. support, saying a strong relationship with the U.S. is the "guiding light" that will keep Azerbaijan moving towards an independent, Euro-Atlantic future. End Summary.

Agitation on Delinking NK  
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¶3. (S/NF) After returning from a 12-day vacation that followed the St. Petersburg summit, President Aliyev unexpectedly called the Ambassador to his office for a farewell meeting on June 22 that lasted a little over an hour. Apologizing repeatedly for being "too candid" and "too heavy" in a farewell meeting, he used the opportunity to deliver a strong message that a "new approach" to U.S.-Azerbaijan relations -- one which takes Azerbaijan's interests into account -- is needed and expected from the new

U.S. administration. He commented that Azerbaijan is in a regional and bilateral environment in which it "sees only negatives. This is a difficult time for our country." Aliyev's frame of mind was clearly affected by the fact that he had just had a difficult meeting with visiting Turkish MFA Under Secretary Cevikoz. The President said Cevikoz had come to "inform" him that Turkey-Armenia normalization was proceeding towards opening of the border and establishment of diplomatic relations by the end of the year, per their April agreement on a "reasonable" timeframe.

¶4. (S/NF) Cevikoz was in Baku to ask Aliyev to agree to "delink" NK from the Turkey-Armenia process, Aliyev said. "They plan to separate (them) completely." Cevikoz told Aliyev that there is "strong pressure" from the U.S. for Turkey to proceed with Armenia, delinked from NK. Aliyev said he told Cevikoz that he will not be a "part of a process" that delinks the two. Turkey can do as it wants, but should take into account that all Azerbaijani society was united, for the first time since independence, against this step by Turkey. (NOTE: Turkish Ambassador in Baku Hulusi Kilic told the Ambassador that Cevikoz had showed Aliyev the draft statement being negotiated by Turkey and Armenia, which he himself has not seen. "We are being careful, so we don't have another problem," Kilic commented. Aliyev insisted the two processes must be "parallel," according to the Turks, while the Armenians continue to insist on "no preconditions." END NOTE.)

¶5. (S/NF) Aliyev rejected the argument that Turkey-Armenia reconciliation will facilitate progress on NK. He noted that

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Armenian President Sargisian's negotiating position hardened at the May 7 meeting in Prague because of the Turkey-Armenia April announcement, but was more reasonable in June in St. Petersburg -- agreeing to a five-year delay in the return of Kelbajar and Lachin, as Aliyev and the Co-Chairs urged him to do -- because Turkish PM Erdogan's Baku statement of May 13 had made him understand that without progress on NK, there would be no border opening. Aliyev asserted that he is the one being constructive now, and if the two processes are delinked, Sargisian will again toughen his position and the NK process will be deadlocked.

¶6. (S/NF) Aliyev said that the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process was "an initiative with good intentions that turned negative" increasing tensions between Turkey and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia -- and also, between the United States and Azerbaijan, "because we consider these steps as against our interests." Only Russia and Iran win in this situation, he maintained.

Calling For a "New Approach"

¶7. (S/NF) Against this backdrop he affirmed that "a new approach is needed, the interests of Azerbaijan should not be ignored -- it is in the interest of Turkey and the United States that they not be ignored. This is something that we want to see." If efforts to delink NK from Turkey-Armenia reconciliation continue, "everything will change ) you must take into account the consequences." Aliyev said there have been too many instances when Azerbaijan saw its interests ignored or damaged )- the March 2008 Minsk Group vote against Azerbaijan in the UN, USG advice to Georgia not to support the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, and now attempts to reconcile Turkey and Armenia regardless of Azerbaijan's interests. The U.S. not only does not treat Azerbaijan as an ally or strategic partner, "but not even as a friend," Aliyev lamented.

¶8. (S/NF) Aliyev continued, "It should be understood that Azerbaijan is a friendly country to the United States and its interests should be taken into account." Although letters from senior USG officials assert strategic partnership,

Aliyev asked, "Where's the substance? There is nothing in it for us." According to the President, Azerbaijan does almost everything the U.S. asks on energy, security, pipelines (although not on "internal" matters, he acknowledged). It was the only gas-producing country to sign the Nabucco Declaration in Hungary and participated in NATO exercises in Georgia. Also, Azerbaijan continues to detain an important Hizballah terrorist despite two visits from the Iranian Foreign Minister demanding his release. Azerbaijan is hosting Israeli President Peres in Baku June 29-30 despite strong Iranian reaction. He also complained that the Arab countries are Azerbaijan's strongest allies on Nagorno-Karabakh, while Israel remains silent on the issue (Note: In his June 29 statement in Baku, Israeli President Peres made a statement in favor of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. End Note.) This is "real substance" that Azerbaijan offers the U.S., which it does at risk to itself. "It is clear we are exposing ourselves -- just because we don't advertise the pressures from Moscow, doesn't mean they don't exist )- they do." In return, Azerbaijan receives "basically nothing" on its critical issues, and "Azerbaijan's only serious ally, Turkey, is being taken away by the Turkey-Armenia process."

#### Double Standards on Democracy

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¶9. (C) Commenting on Azerbaijan's internal governance, Aliyev was equally downbeat. He stated that if Azerbaijan had not seen "silence" from the U.S. Congress and U.S. civil society in response to recent events in Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan would have been "more flexible" with respect to internal political reform. "(U.S. criticism) was always part of our relations," Aliyev noted, then added that when the 2008 crackdowns in Georgia and Armenia elicited only a muted response, in his view, "we woke up." "It is just talk about

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democracy, which is an instrument to achieve other ends."

¶10. (C) Arguing that he has been one of the "biggest advocates" of Azerbaijan's Euro-Atlantic orientation since the mid-1990's, he asked why the USG's attitude towards him turned negative after his 2003 election, why the U.S. promoted a color revolution and supported figures like Farhad Aliyev and Rasul Guliyev in 2005, why the U.S. continues to support groups that "see me as the opponent or the enemy," and why senior U.S. officials continue to comment publicly and negatively about Azerbaijan. "Why are you acting against a strategic partner?" Rejecting Aliyev's contentions, the Ambassador underscored that the U.S. supports the development of the institutions and processes of democracy in Azerbaijan as elsewhere, not individual parties or politicians, and that this remains a core element of our foreign policy.

¶11. (S/NF) Azerbaijan hopes and expects that the new U.S. administration will address Azerbaijan's interests, Aliyev stated. Specifically, "we need to see substance and assistance in the areas where we need it." For example, Section 907 is "ridiculous, just a political tool," and should be lifted. The USG should respond to Azerbaijan's numerous requests for arms sales )- "only defensive equipment, especially air defense, nothing that could be used against Armenia ... We are in a situation in which we must be able to protect ourselves, at least for a little while, if attacked," Aliyev said.

¶12. (S/NF) With respect to the Turkey-Armenia problem, Aliyev said, "If the U.S. continues to attempt to influence Turkey to delink, it will be bad for us." Instead, he argued for more steps to force Armenia to agree to an NK solution. Azerbaijan "needs to know what to expect; what will the new Administration's attitude be towards our needs." Surprisingly, he said, "NK is complicated, and I don't expect any serious support from any country . . . It is hard to press us and the Armenians."

## Serious Support to Enhanced Afghanistan Deployment

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¶13. (S/NF) Aliyev warmed to the idea that Azerbaijan's contribution of a battalion in Afghanistan in exchange for a Train and Equip Program (TEP) would help provide the substance he was talking about. He said that he was "very positive" on the plan, and had instructed Defense Minister Abiyev to carry it forward. He repeated that if the United States could help with respect to sales of defensive equipment to help meet Azerbaijan's defense needs, it would send a "very strong positive signal." Azerbaijan does not want to be dependent on equipment it gets from Russia, which he believes the Russians have tampered with "electronically" so it can be controlled by them if necessary. He explained, "We need equipment that cannot be under Russian or Iranian control."

¶14. (S/NF) Aliyev finally concluded that while these are his candid observations, "I want all this to be in the past, especially with the new Administration's desire to help with regional development. But Azerbaijan cannot be ignored, because without Azerbaijan, nothing will work. This reality must also be taken into account. Turkish-Azerbaijani energy cooperation will stop ) they know it ) and others will benefit. Armenia is not worth losing Azerbaijan as a partner and as a link to Central Asia."

Iran

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¶15. (S/NF) Commenting on the situation in Iran, Aliyev said that current developments were unexpected, but can be explained as the result of internal rivalry and the "tiredness" of the people with the "restrictions of the mullah regime." He said that fact that millions of people were not afraid to demonstrate despite repression in Iran signals that this "could be the beginning of a new stage. Iran is not the same as before." He said that Azerbaijan is concerned with potential spillover effects, including refugee

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flows if the situation worsens, and has taken necessary measures to tighten border security.

NEC and Fulbright

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¶16. (SBU) Aliyev affirmed that if Azerbaijan had not wanted to assist the U.S. to acquire a site for a new Embassy, "we would not have offered one." He welcomed the offer of a USG team visiting Baku to work with local experts to find language that will resolve lease payment provisions "to look like a more normal arrangement" under Azerbaijani law. He suggested "some kind of indexation, perhaps indexation to official USG inflation estimates, so that after twenty years the price won't be ridiculous." The USG could pay a fixed sum for the first 5 to 10 years of the lease, and then every 5 or 10 years thereafter adjusted for inflation.

¶17. (SBU) Aliyev agreed to instruct the Education Minister to sign the necessary service contract to fund the six Azerbaijani students selected this year for the Fulbright program under the bilateral MOU on education cooperation.

First Lady Underscores the Message

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¶18. (C) In a small, largely social farewell luncheon the First Lady hosted for the Ambassador on June 22, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva also delivered a surprising plea for greater U.S. partnership and support. Switching suddenly from small talk in her now fluent English to Azerbaijani about halfway through the meal, she argued emotionally that she and President Aliyev are committed to Azerbaijan's Euro-Atlantic

orientation -- Azerbaijan's "only choice" for an independent future -- including on democracy and human rights. They are seeking to push Azerbaijan to become more progressive, but it requires a change in people's mentality and this requires time. Azerbaijan faces strong pressures, both internal and external, Aliyeva asserted, and a strong relationship with the U.S. is the "guiding light" that will keep Azerbaijan on course towards its goal. She applauded her husband as a man of "conscience and principle" who keeps his word and merits greater U.S. support.

¶19. (C) She discussed at length Aliyev's difficult decision not to go to Istanbul, saying he, like so many others in the world, has great hopes for President Obama, with whom Aliyev had hoped very much to meet. She said Aliyev judged, however, that it would have been impossible to explain to the Azerbaijani people why he was "endorsing" the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement with his presence given the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the end, therefore, he decided he could not go. Former Ambassador to the U.S. and uncle of the First Lady, Hafiz Pashayev, later told the Ambassador that he was very surprised at Aliyeva's impassioned plea for stronger U.S. support at the lunch, saying it is highly out of character for the President or the First Lady to say or do anything that suggests "weakness."

Comment

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¶20. (S/NF) President Aliyev's refrain "we do everything for you and you do nothing for us" is now familiar (reftel). Regrettably, he says it with the conviction of someone who has convinced himself it is true. Although he presented a long list of grievances, his current funk is a direct result of his sense of betrayal over the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process, first by the Turks, then by the Americans. Aliyev is pragmatic and may yet understand that this process will likely move forward with or without Azerbaijan's acquiescence. He is clearly probing for what price he can extract for his acquiescence on Turkey-Armenia. He mentioned weapons sales, Section 907, more pressure on Armenia to move forward on NK, and more latitude with respect to Azerbaijan's shortcomings on democracy and human rights. Septel will explore suggestions for carrots and sticks that could be employed to persuade Aliyev to be constructive with respect to the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process.

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